



History Explorer

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

www.LansingHistory.org

April 2015

The Secrets of the Harper House

Tuesday, May 12, 2015 – 6:00pm

Harper House - 1408 Cambridge Rd., Lansing

\$50 per person

Join HSGL for a behind the scenes look at the Harper House, Lansing’s largest and most elegant historic home. Built for Harry and Ragna Harper just before the Great Depression struck, the home stands as a testimony to Lansing’s auto prowess in the 1920s. President of the Prudden Wheel Company, and then the President and General Manager of Lansing’s Motor Wheel, Harper used his wealth and civic standing to do great good in the community, including serving as a major patron of both Sparrow and St. Lawrence Hospitals.

The evening includes hors d’oeuvres and a tour of the home. Please see insert for information on tickets and sponsorships. All funds raised benefit the HSGL museum fund.

Look What’s Coming: Treasures from the Vault

The history of the Greater Lansing area can be found in all sorts of nooks and crannies. Besides the exhibits and programs of the HSGL, there are interesting items tucked away in various archives, small museums, long-time businesses, and among personal collections. We want to feature some of these items in a new series for the newsletter to be called “Treasures from the Vault.” Next month, Mary Kwas will kick off the series with an article on one of the objects held by the Forest Parke Library & Archives, located at the Capital Area District Library. Future articles may feature other archival holdings from CADL, collections of the HSGL, and who knows what else. The series will appear six to eight times per year, depending on submissions. Readers are invited to submit ideas or short articles for this new series.

Lansing Goes to War Exhibit

Lansing City Hall – 124 W. Michigan Ave.

Monday – Friday, 7:30 am – 6:00 pm

Thru June 30th

HSGL’s new pop up exhibit, *Lansing Goes to War*, a collection of 150 artifacts and ephemera from the Civil War to the First Gulf War, is open. Thanks to all those who joined us on March 5 for the opening. The exhibit includes uniforms, medals for bravery, letters sent home, locally made war-themed art, and other mementos from Lansing families.

Items from the home front are also included, such as the first tank shell manufactured by Oldsmobile during World War II, and a scrapbook kept by an Eastern High School student while her sweetheart and future husband fought overseas. Other iconic items include two nurses uniforms, mess kits, and a telegram sent to a Lansing army wife beginning with the words “We regret to inform you...” Through this exhibit we are reminded that war affects everyone, both on the battlefield and at home.

HSGL would particularly like to thank all of the local collectors who loaned items for the exhibit, including Craig Whitford, Scott Shattuck, Ron Springer, Jana Nichols, Carl Kentner, Jacob McCormick, Tom Plasman, the Baker Family, the Logan Family, and Eaton County Courthouse Square.



Wyatt Duzenbury and the Most Secret Mission

by Douglas Finley

Hiroshima, Japan, August 6, 1945. The first atomic bomb is dropped. The genie is out of the bottle. It is the most significant event of modern history. And Lansing's Wyatt Duzenbury was there. He saw it firsthand, sitting in the seat behind the pilot on the Enola Gay.

Duzenbury was born in Edmore, Michigan, in 1913. His family moved to Lansing, where he attended Lansing Eastern High School. Finding steady work was difficult after leaving school. He drove a taxi for the Michigan Club Taxi; worked on a tree-trimming crew with the Lansing Parks Department and, in 1938, found work in Lansing under the Works Progress Administration. In June 1942, he joined the U.S. Army Air Forces.

Duzenbury was trained as a Flight Engineer and, while on duty with the Eighth Air Force, was assigned to a B-17 bomber crew piloted by Paul W. Tibbets, Jr. Their mission: high-risk daylight bombing raids over occupied Europe. Later, Tibbets' B-17 crew was transferred to the Twelfth Air Force in North Africa under General James H. [Jimmy] Doolittle, where Tibbets and his crew flew more successful bombing runs. It was a wild ride, but

none of them had any idea where the ride would take them.

In September 1944, Tibbets was ordered to Colorado Springs. There he was told he was going to pilot a new Boeing B-29 Superfortress on a top secret mission but was not yet told what that mission was. To reflect the importance of the mission, he was authorized to hand pick his flight crew. From his old B-17 days, Tibbets wanted Wyatt Duzenbury as his Flight Engineer. When Duzenbury got word he had been reassigned stateside he had no idea why.

Soon Duzenbury was in Seattle, Washington, where he saw B-29s roll off the Boeing assembly line. Then he was off to the Army Air Forces Technical Center in Florida where he was trained on the sophisticated instrument panel the Flight Engineer would use on the B-29.



Enola Gay Flight Crew
Sgt. Wyatt Duzenbury, Flight Engineer, center; Col. Paul Tibbets, Flight Commander, center left

It was the job of the pilot to control the altitude and direction the plane was going. The Flight Engineer, sitting directly behind the pilot, was responsible for adjusting the throttles; the fuel mixture; the supercharger and propeller pitch. He computed the aircraft's cruising range, fuel consumption, engine performance, weight and balance. If something went wrong, the Flight Engineer would be the first to know and it would be his job to fix it. Experts, then and now, identify the Flight Engineer as the second most important person behind the pilot on the B-29.

Tibbets, who by this time had been briefed on the details of the mission, concluded the B-29 would need to make an evasive move to avoid the anticipated shockwave from the bomb they would drop on Japan; a shockwave that could destroy the B-29. Tibbets, Duzenbury and the remainder of the crew trained for this evasive navigation over the Atlantic off the coast of Cuba.

Historical Society of Greater Lansing

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www.LansingHistory.org

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In May 1945, Tibbets, Duzenbury and the crew were shipped to Tinian, an island in the Marianas. The airfield at Tinian had an 8,500-foot runway, among the longest in the world at the time. And it was six hours from Japan, a 12-hour round trip, well within the range of a B-29. Tinian also was secure, a good location from which to launch the secret mission.

On July 26, the cruiser Indianapolis anchored off Tinian and unloaded a 15-foot wooden crate. Inside was the atomic bomb named "Little Boy." It was 12 feet long and weighed 9,000 pounds -- bigger than any bomb the crew had ever seen. Its explosive power was as much as two thousand B-29 Superfortresses could carry fully loaded.

Having delivered the bomb without incident, the Indianapolis moved on toward the Philippines. Four days after departing Tinian, Indianapolis was sunk by a Japanese submarine.

By August 1, plans for the mission were set. All the crew knew, however, was they were the lead plane that would drop a very powerful bomb on one of four Japanese cities. They would be accompanied by a photo plane, one with scientific instruments to measure the blast, and three others that would scout ahead. Flight Commander Tibbets chose to name the plane the Enola Gay in honor of his mother.

On August 5, the crew got word they would go the next day, August 6, 1945. That night the crew was briefed, for the first time, on the nature of their weapon -- an atomic bomb. They were not told their target was the city of Hiroshima until they were airborne.

According to official military records, the Enola Gay traveled 1,500 miles over open water to the coast of Japan. The crew constantly faced the danger of being hit by anti-aircraft fire, enemy fighters, or suffering

mechanical or other failures, which would intensify the risks of carrying the bomb. Throughout the mission the element of hazard from the unknown prevailed, for this was the first time that this bomb, much more destructive than any other in existence, had been dropped from an airplane. Shortly after 08:00 a.m. the crew brought the plane in over Hiroshima and, at 08:15, the bomb was released. The Enola Gay turned and climbed rapidly as practiced and headed back to Tinian safely. But the eyes of each crew member were glued on what was happening 31,000 feet below. Later, few could believe what they had witnessed.



Enola Gay Crew

Major Ferebee, Captain Van Kirk, Colonel Tibbets, Captain Lewis, Staff Sgt. Caron, Sgt. Stiborik, Staff Sgt. Duzenbury, Pvt. 1st Class Nelson, Sgt. Shumard

When the names of the crew of the Enola Gay were released, Wyatt Duzenbury's mother and sisters in Lansing were shocked. His mother, Anna Duzenbury, then living at 212 North Logan (now MLK), was very proud of her son when learning of his role on the mission and "hoped his actions would help win the war." On August 15, six days after a second bomb was dropped on Nagasaki, the Japanese surrendered.

After the war, many of the Enola Gay crew spent their time writing books, making speeches, appearing on the cover of magazines and signing autographs. But not Wyatt Duzenbury. He stayed in the service and found himself on the Bikini Atoll in 1946, where the U.S. began testing even more powerful atomic weapons.

Wyatt Duzenbury died of bone cancer on August 31, 1992, in Smyrna, Georgia.

The author, a military insignia collector whose hobby had been reported in the Lansing State Journal, was invited by Wyatt's sister, then living in East Lansing, to go through Wyatt's foot locker on a "patch hunt." It was there he discovered Duzenbury's role in history.



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P.O. Box 12095
Lansing, MI 48901

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in the Historical Society of Greater Lansing

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Historical Society of Greater Lansing Harper House Fundraiser

Tuesday, May 12, 2015 - 6:00pm-8:00pm

Harper House - 1408 Cambridge Road, Lansing

Number of tickets _____ Total enclosed \$ _____ (\$50.00 per person)
See Reverse for Sponsorship Opportunities

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Historical Society of Greater Lansing Harper House Fundraiser

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